

The Reception of Borges in Germany: A Timeline of Translations

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Abstract: The reception of Borges in the Federal Republic of Germany began unusually late and was slow to gather momentum. It commenced only in 1959 with the first German translation of a selection of short stories. The article discusses reasons for this delay and chronicles the increasing selection of Borges' work made available in German.

Key words: Jorge Luis Borges; Borges in German translation; German reception of Borges.

INTRODUCTION

What is particular about the reception of Borges in Germany?¹ To use Geisler's laconic and succinct label, it was belated (Geisler, 3). Other European countries were also slow in their response to Borges, whose reception only started after 1945; however, the curiously late introduction and the restricted selection of Borges's work is a uniquely German response.² As unique as the slow reception was, a steady increase in interest culminated in a first peak of publications in the 1980s. These publications were mainly translations, including a first edition of the collected works. A second peak can be seen at the beginning of this century, which is marked by a second comprehensive edition of Borges's work as well as a wave of publications investigating broader themes in his writing. Thus, it can be said that the reception of Borges in Germany and the concomitant history of the translation of Borges into German are an ongoing development.

Early in the 20th century, Borges had already laid the foundation to what we now understand to be quintessential Latin-American literature, yet significant reception and integration into Germany's literary culture did not occur until the 1970s. This fact is all the more puzzling since, early on in his literary career, Borges not only translated German expressionist poetry into Spanish, but also critically analyzed it in a conscious effort to utilize its characteristic neologisms and modern metaphors. He thereby introduced German expressionist poetry to the *ultraistas*, possibly aiding them in their quest for a bold renewal of

¹ The focus of this article is the Borges publications in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1945.

² For Geisler the start of the German Borges reception begins in 1965 with Marianne Kesting's 1965 essay "Das hermetische Labyrinth". In 1975 *Iberoromania*, a publication from the University Tübingen, dedicated a special edition to Borges.

poetics (Geisler, 5; Eitel, 1). Despite this relationship with German literature, Borges was virtually unknown to the German reading public even into the 1960s. A first translation of a small selection of Borges's short stories was published as late as 1959.³ Until well into the second half of the 20th century Borges was not as well known as the fundamentally new concept of literature through translation and the saliency of his contributions to modern Latin-American literature and to European modern and post-modern philosophy should have merited. The reception of Borges in Germany, more so than in any other European country, was defined by extra-literary considerations (Gutiérrez, 59).

GERMAN RECEPTION

The difficulty Europe had with Borges is partially the result of a lingering perception of Latin America and its cultural production as that of a colonial society (Gutiérrez, 66; Geisler, 3). This notion was particularly long lived in Germany, where well into the 1950s the German academic community still saw Latin American nations as essentially colonial societies which could not produce a literature of world quality. Early on, the canon of Latin American authors had been established by such romance scholars as the eminent Ernst Curtius; it encompassed José Eustasio Rivera, Ricardo Güiraldes, and Rómulo Gallegos, writers who all seemed to express the expected South American milieu (Gutiérrez, 59). Borges, the *hacedor*, would not have found recognition in such limited discourse. These limiting expectations and perception have of course changed throughout the second half of the 20th century and we have arrived at a point where a more objective literary analysis is possible⁴.

In the second phase, German historic events such as the Nazi regime, World War II and in particular the Holocaust, resulted in a conscious literary movement after 1945 to face these issues. The new, internally-focused perspective has proven to be a much greater and persistent hurdle for a meaningful Borges reception. In other words, the development of the pseudo-Germanic, and the censorship and cultural semi-isolation Germany experienced during Hitler's regime, precluded a public reflection on new literary movements from Latin American countries. After 1945 and the end of the Nazi regime a further delay in the reception of Borges resulted from a changed dynamic of German literary production. In West Germany the literary avant-garde vowed to break with the classical German literary tradition, in an attempt to address and reflect the Nazi catastrophe and the Holocaust. This internal re-focusing was manifested by an abundance of newly established literary publications. Just three of these were: "Die Wandlung" (*The Change*, 1945-1949), editor Otto Basil; "Das goldene Tor" (*The Golden Gate*, 1946-1952), editor Alfred Döblin; "Der Ruf" (*The Call*, 1946-1949), editors Alfred Andersch and Hans-Werner Richter. It was the latter pub-

³ Borges. "Labyrinth." Karl August Horst, transl. München: Hanser, 1959.

⁴ See for example Adelheid Hanke-Schaefer, 2007, *Totenklage um Deutschland: Echo deutscher Stimmen im Werk von Jorge Luis Borges*, an analysis of reflections of German authors on Borges' work. From 1986 to 2003 the publishing house Walter Frey, Berlin, published *travía*, a literary periodical dedicated to the culture and society, politics and history of Spain, Portugal and Latin-America, and the Portuguese-speaking African and Asian nations, and their relationship with Germany. An article in volume 39 is Hanke-Schäfer "Polemik um das Frühwerk von Jorge Luis Borges".

lication that set the agenda and the aesthetics of Germany's post-war critical literary production. The contributors of "Der Ruf" founded the literary elite group *Gruppe 47*, which was the leading influence on German literary production into the 1960s.⁵ The explicit goals of this publication were

to build a democratic elite in the areas of literature and publication; to demonstrate the practical use of democratic methods in a community of individuals in hope of eliciting an ongoing effect; and to reach these goals without a manifesto, without official organization and without promoting any prefigured collective agenda. (Frenzel, 656; my translation).

Once again, Borges did not fit.

It is worth noting how the awareness of Borges's literary texts was late not only in Germany, but also in France. Although France understands its language, French, to be a member of the romance language family, this awareness did not include a strong interest in literatures produced by Latin American writers. A similar problem persisted in France as in Germany; Argentina was still seen as a colonial country and thus was felt to be incapable of an innovative literature of global importance. Nevertheless, France showed a more positive response to Borges and its literary and philosophic climate was ready to engage with Borges's new poetic aesthetics (Collin, 80).

By contrast, after World War II, Germany had neither the literary climate nor the social context to be receptive to Borges's new type of literature, with his transformation of existing literary texts into a new a-historic fantastic world, even though, or maybe because, it was grounded in the canon of European literatures and philosophies, including German classical literature. The few early translations of a selection of Borges's work were not successful in introducing Borges to a wider German audience. This changed only with the publication of Borges's collected works in the 1980s, with the *Verlagspolitik*, politics in the world of publishing (Beutler, 11). The South American boom, and with it the works of Borges, became a viable commodity only in 1976, when the theme of the *Frankfurter Buchmesse* was Latin American literature.

GERMAN EDITIONS OF BORGES'S WORK

The following bibliography charts Borges's translations into German, starting with the translation of stories in 1959. Although it is not exhaustive, it demonstrates the late and selective availability of Borges in German. It also demonstrates the trend away from a few selected poems and stories to the translation and publication of Borges's collected work. The discussion about the inclusion of extraneous material into this collection is ongoing (see, for example, transcriptions of taped interviews; Brode, FAZ). It is known that Borges had a special relationship to German literature and language. Yet despite his often repeated

⁵ The history of "Der Ruf" (The Call) is emblematic for post-1945 publication limitations in West-Germany. The US-Military Government granted permission for the publication in 1945; the journal was subject to censorship of the US-Military Government. In 1947 the journal was forbidden and had to change location and editor in order to be able to continue its publication.

sobriquet as an authority especially of German, but also of Germanic and Old English literature (Dill, 254), there are no individual translations of his literary and linguistic histories into German: *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (1951); *Introducción a la literatura inglesa* (1965); or *Literaturas germánicas medievales* (1966).

- 1959 *Labyrinthe: Erzählungen*. Karl August Horst, Eva Hesse, Wolfgang Luchtig, Liselotte Reger. München: Hanser. (all stories from *Ficciones* 1944, and *El Aleph* 1949)
Labyrinthe: Erzählungen. 2nd printing. Karl August Horst, Eva Hesse, Wolfgang Luchtig, Liselotte Reger. München: Hanser. (all stories from *Ficciones*, 1944; and “El Aleph” 1949)
- 1962 *Labyrinthe: Erzählungen*. Karl August Horst, Liselotte Reger, trans. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. (all stories from *Ficciones*, 1944; and “El Aleph”, 1949)
Labyrinthe: Erzählungen. Liselotte Reger, transl. München: Heyne. (all stories from *Ficciones*, 1944 and *El Aleph*, 1949)
- 1963 *Ausgewählte Gedichte*. Otto Wolf. Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag. (selection of poems from *Poemas*, 1923-1958)
- 1965 *Geschichte der Ewigkeit: Essays*. Karl August Horst, trans. München: Hanser. (selected essays from *Historia de la eternidad*, 1936; *Discusión*, 1932; *Otras inquisiciones*, 1937-1952)
- 1966 *Das Eine und die Vielen. Essays zur Literatur*. München: Hanser. (selected essays from *Historia de la eternidad*, *Discusión*, and *Otras inquisiciones*. The remaining essays from these 3 works are separately published under the title *Geschichte der Ewigkeit, History of Eternity*.)
- 1969 *Labyrinthe: Erzählungen*. Karl August Horst, Liselotte Reger, trans. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. 2nd edition. (all stories from *Ficciones*, 1944; and *El Aleph*, 1949)
Borges und ich. Gedichte und Prosa. Karl August Horst, trans. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. (*El Hacedor*, 1960)
- 1970 *Sämtliche Erzählungen: Das Aleph, Fiktionen, Universalgeschichte der Niedertracht*. München: Hanser. (the collected stories from *El Aleph*, 1949; *Ficciones*, 1944; *Historia universal de la infamia*, 1935)
- 1972 *Universalgeschichte der Niedertracht und andere Prosastücke*. Karl August Horst, et al., trans. Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein. (“*Historia universal de la infamia*”, 1935; and other prose writings)
- 1974 *Die Bibliothek von Babel: Erzählungen*. Karl August Horst, Curt Meyer-Clason. Stuttgart: Reclam. (*La biblioteca de Babel*, 1941 and other stories. including *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, 1940)
- 1978 *Ausgewählte Gedichte: Auswahl aus den Poemas 1923-1958*. Otto Wolf. München: Heyne Verlag. (selection of poems from *Poemas 1923-1958*)
- 1979 *Labyrinthe*. Karl August Horst, Eva Hesse. Das besondere Taschenbuch 27. München: Heyne. (authorized paperback edition)
- 1980 *Gedichte 1969-1976*. Curt Meyer-Clason, transl. and ed. München: Hanser. *Gesammelte Werke*. Band 2. (*Obra poética 1969-1976*). Since the first German translation of Borges in 1959 the publication house Hanser had consistently offered German translations of selected works of Borges; in 1980 Hanser began publishing a first collected works edition.

- 1981 *Essays 1932-1936*. Karl August Horst, Curt Meyer-Clason, Melanie Walz, trans. München: Hanser. Gesammelte Werke. Band 5/1
Erzählungen: 1949 - 1970. Gesammelte Werke. Gisbert Haefs, Karl August Horst. München: Hanser. Band 3/2.
Gesammelte Werke. Essays. Karl August Horst, trans. München: Hanser. Vol. 5/1 and 5/2
- 1982 *Gedichte 1925-1965*. Gisbert Haefs, trans. and ed. München: Hanser. Gesammelte Werke, Band 1. (*Poemas 1925-1965*)
Borges und ich. Karl August Horst, Gisbert Haefs, and Claudio Magris, trans. München: Hanser Verlag, 1982. (*El hacedor*, 1960)
- 1985 *Gemeinsame Werke. Band 2: Chroniken von Bustos Domecq - Neue Geschichten von Bustos Domecq*. Gisbert Haefs, trans. and ed. München: Hanser. (*Crónicas de Bustos Domecq*, 1967, with Adolfo Bioy Cesares)
Borges und ich. Gedicht und Prosa 1960. Karl August Horst, trans. Gisbert Haefs, adopted and ed. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. (*El hacedor*, 1960)
- 1986 *Die zwei Labyrinthe: Lesebuch*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, anthology of short stories)
- 1987 *Die letzte Reise des Odysseus. Essays 1980-1982*. Gisbert Haefs, trans. and ed. München: Hanser. (Essays 1980-1982)
- 1990 *Die zwei Labyrinthe: Lesebuch*. Andrea Wöhrle, ed. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. 3rd printing.
- 1991 *Werke. Vol. 2 Kabbala und Tango : Essays 1930 – 1932*. Karl August Horst, trans. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. Between 1991 and 1995 the printing house Fischer offered the most complete selection of Borges's work to date in a 20 volumes paper back edition. This edition contains the first bilingual edition of the complete lyrics.
- 1992 *Werke. Vol. 5 Fiktionen: Erzählungen 1939-1944*. Karl August Horst, trans. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. (*Ficciones, 1933-1944*)
Á bao a qu. Ulla de Herrera, Edith Aaron, trans. Wuppertal: Edition Schwarze Seite. (excerpts from *Libro de los seres imaginarios*)
- 1999 *Der Geschmack eines Apfels. Gedichte*. Raoul Schrott, Gisbert Haefs, transls. Raoul Schrott, ed. München: Hanser, (Selection of poems)
Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 1: Der Essays erster Teil. Evaristo Carriego. Diskussionen. Karl August Horst, Curt Meyer-Clason, Melanie Walz, Gisbert Haefs, trans. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser Neuausgabe. (New edition of collected works⁶)

⁶ To commemorate the 100th anniversary of Borges' birth, the publishing house Hanser launched a second edition of Borges' collected works, reedited translations. There are 12 volumes planned in this series; volume 11 is forthcoming in 2009.)

- 2000 *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 5: Der Erzählungen erster Teil. Universalgeschichte der Niedertracht. Fiktion. Das Aleph.* Gisbert Haefs, Karl August Horst, Wolfgang Luchtig, transls. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition)
- 2001 *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 6: Der Erzählungen zweiter Teil David Brodies Bericht. Das Sandbuch. Shakespeares Gedächtnis.* Gisbert Haefs, Karl August Horst, Wolfgang Luchtig, transls. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition)
- Die Bibliothek von Babel: eine Erzählung.* Gisbert Haefs, Klaus Detjan, trans. Göttingen: Steidl.
- 2003 *Eine neue Widerlegung der Zeit und 66 andere Essays.* Die andere Bibliothek, Bd. 218. Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2003.
- “Die Münze” in: *El caballero Carmelo. Der Held Carmelo. Erzählungen aus Südamerika.* München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 2: Der Essays zweiter Teil Geschichte der Ewigkeit. Von Büchern und Autoren.* Gisbert Haefs, Kurt Meyer-Clason, Karl August Horst, transls. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition)
- Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 3: Der Essays dritter Teil. Inquisitionen. Vorworte.* Gisbert Haefs, Karl August Horst, trans. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition)
- 2005 *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 3: Der Essays dritter Teil. Geschichte der Ewigkeit. Von Büchern und Autoren.* Karl August Horst, trans. München: Hanser. (“Textos cautivos”)
- 2006 *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 7: Der Gedichte erster Teil. Buenos Aires mit Inbrunst. Mond gegenüber. Notizheft San Martín. Borges und ich.* Zweisprachige Ausgabe. Gisbert Haefs, Karl August Horst, transls. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition; German-Spanish bilingual edition)⁷ Footnote only poetry is in Spanish German
- 2007 *Argentinische Erzählungen.* Borges editor. Monika Lopez, Rudolf Wittkopf, transls. Frankfurt a.M.: Edition Büchergilde. (A selection of Borges’s stories in a representative collection of modern Argentine fantastic stories.)
- Die Bibliothek von Babel.* Volumes 1-30. 1st edition. Frankfurt a.M.: Edition Büchergilde. (1975, collaboration with Franco Maria Ricci)
- Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 8: Der Gedichte zweiter Teil. Der Andere, der Selbe. Für die sechs Saiten. Lob des Schattens. Das Gold der Tiger.* Zweisprachige Ausgabe. Gisbert Haefs, transl. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser. Neuausgabe. (New edition; German-Spanish bilingual edition)
- 2008 *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Band 10: Die Anthologien. Handbuch der phantastischen Zoologie. Das Buch von Himmel und Hölle. Buch der Träume.* Gisbert Haefs,

⁷ In Borges collected works, 12 volumes, new edition from the publisher Hanser, only the poetry volumes 7 and 8 are bilingual Spanish-German.

Maria Bamberg, Ulla de Herrera, Edith Aron, transl. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold, eds. München: Hanser.

- 2009 (forthcoming) "Der gemeinsamen Werke erster Teil. Sechs Aufgaben für Don Isidro Parodi. Zwei denkwürdige Phantasien. Mord nach Modell". Borges and Bioy. Liselotte Reger, Gisbert Haefs, transl. Gisbert Haefs, Fritz Arnold Gisbert, eds. Band 11. Jorge Luis Borges - Werke in zwölf Bänden. Neuausgabe. München: Hanser. (Part one of the Borges and Bioy collaborations. Volume 11 of the 12 volume new edition of Borges collected works.)

Secondary material (German studies of Borges)⁸ One chapter in each of these books is dedicated to Borges. :

- 1978 Eitel, Wolfgang, ed. *Lateinamerikanische Literatur der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Kröner,
- 1986 Geisler, Eberhard, "Jorge Luis Borges" in: *Kritisches Literaturlexikon zur fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Arnold, Heinz Ludwig, ed. München. Edition Text und Kritik.
- 1989 Herlinghaus, Hermann. *Romankunst in Lateinamerika*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag,
- 1990 Beutler, Gisela, ed. *Sieh den Fluß der Hispano-amerikanische Lyrik der Gegenwart*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- 1995 Wittmann, Reinhard. *Auf geflickten Strassen: literarischer Neubeginn in München 1945 bis 1949*. München: Monacensia.
- 1999 Dill, Hans-Otto. *Geschichte der lateinamerikanischen Literatur im Überblick*. Stuttgart: reclam.
- Hanke-Schaefer, Adelheid. *Borges zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius.
- 2003 Strosetky, Christoph. *Lateinamerikanische Literatur*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag,
- 2007 Rössner, Michael. ed. *Lateinamerikanische Literaturgeschichte*. 2.ed. Verlag J.B. Metzler.
- Hanke-Schaefer, Adelheid. *Totenklage um Deutschland: Echo deutscher Stimmen im Werk von Jorge Luis Borges*. Berlin: Verlag Walter Frey.

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- (2004): *The Translators Of The Thousand and One Nights*. Esther Allen, transl. The Translation Studies Reader. Lawrence Venuti, ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2nd ed.

⁸ The texts in this section are either monographs or have a significant part of the text dedicated to Borges.

- BROYLES, Y. J. (1981): *The German Response to Latin American Literature. And the Reception of Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda*. Heidelberg: Winter.
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- DILL, H.-O. (1999): *Geschichte der lateinamerikanischen Literatur im Überblick*. Stuttgart: reclam.
- EITEL, W. (ed.) (1978): *Lateinamerikanische Literatur der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Kröner.
- FRENZEL, E. & HERBERT, A. (1990): *Daten deutscher Dichtung. Chronologischer Abriss der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Band 2. München: dtv.
- GUTIÉRREZ GIRARDOT, R. (1990): "Borges in Germany. A Difficult and Contradictory Fascination". In Aizenberg, E. (ed.): *Borges and His Successors. The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 59-79.
- HERLINGHAUS, H. (1989): *Romankunst in Lateinamerika*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
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- RÖSSNER, M. (ed.) (2007): *Lateinamerikanische Literaturgeschichte*. Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2. ed.
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- TÓIBÍN, C.: "Don't abandon me. Borges: A life by Edwin Williamson". <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n09/toib01_.html>
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